

Protection of the Holy Theotokos
Russian Orthodox Church
Akhiok
Kodiak Island
Alaska

HABS No. AK-54

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

PROTECTION OF THE HOLY THEOTOKOS RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

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Location: Akhiok, Kodiak Island, Alaska.

Present Owner: Alaska Diocese, Orthodox Church in America.

Present Occupant: Protection of the Holy Theotokos Russian Orthodox Church.

Present Use: Church.

Significance: A number of historic Russian Orthodox churches survive in Alaska, built by Native congregations in traditional forms. The well-proportioned Protection of the Holy Theotokos Russian Orthodox Church has sanctuary, nave, and belltower separately defined on the exterior. Painted white with green trim and set on a hill apart from the village, the church is a distinctive presence on the landscape.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1926.¹
2. Builder: Carpenters from the Alitak Packing Co. constructed the building.²
3. Original plans and construction: The Alitak Packing Co., headquartered in Bellingham, Washington, but active in this area, donated the church.³ The building remains essentially as it was constructed, with a nave, sanctuary, and belltower reading as separate elements on the exterior. Neither the pyramid-roofed belfry or cupola had an onion dome.
4. Alterations and additions: Ephraim Agnot relates that once the north wind blew the church over. Villagers jacked it up and slid it back on to its foundations.

B. Previous churches on the site: The previous churches were named Holy Trinity. The first church was established by 1881, when church authorities inventoried it.⁴ At that time,

¹ Plaque on building and Ephraim Agnot, reader, interviewed by author, July 3, 1989.

² Agnot.

³ Agnot.

⁴ Alaskan Russian Church Archives, reel 180.

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the village had a population of 114 Eskimos.⁵ In 1895, a church account reported that a church was built in 1890 "of logs transported from Kodiak."⁶ It was located just north of the present church; its site is marked by a shrine. The present church has a different name, allegedly because Holy Trinity's feast day fell during the fishing season, when many of the villagers were away.

After the 1964 tidal wave, people from Kaguyak, whose village was destroyed, moved to Akhiok.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The small church has a gable-roofed nave, a sanctuary with a lower gable roof, but with the same pitch, and a pyramid-roofed belltower.
2. Condition of fabric: Good. The building has been recently repainted.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The building measures 20'-4" x 57'-11". The nave measures 20'-4" x 30'-5", the sanctuary 14'-3" x 15'-6", and the belltower 10'-3" x 12'-1".
2. Foundations: There is a post foundation, enclosed on the perimeter with horizontal beaded boards covered with asphalt siding. At the sill level, a board kicks out at an angle, forming a water table.
3. Walls: The walls are covered with a novelty siding that is beveled on both edges. There are shingles in the east gable end of the nave and the east sanctuary end is covered with clapboards. On the south and west sides of the belltower there is painted decoration. The building is painted white with green trim.
4. Structural system, framing: Light wood framing.
5. Porches: There is a plank porch in front of the entrance, with a plain 2" x 4" railing.
6. Chimneys: There is a stovepipe in the ridge.

⁵ Ivan Petroff, Report on the Population, Industries, and Resources of Alaska (Washington: GPO, 1884), 28.

⁶ "Concerning the Orthodox Mission in America," October 14, 1895, translated by Sister Victoria, Orthodox Alaska 6 (January 1977): 40.

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7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance is located on the south side of the belltower. Flat, metal double doors are set in a plain surround. The flat board lintel has rounded ends and a hint of a pediment.
- b. Windows: The windows have six-over-six-light double-hung sash; on the south side they are topped by flat board lintels with rounded ends and the hint of a pediment. There is a bull's-eye window on the south side of the belltower; a six-light sash has been put up behind the round opening. The bull's-eye opening on the west side of the belltower has been closed.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The gable roofs on the nave and sanctuary are covered with wood shingles, painted green. The two-story belltower has a pyramidal roof, also covered with wood shingles, painted green.
- b. Belfry: Rising from the roof of the belltower is a square belfry with a pyramidal roof. The walls are vertical boards, and there are round-arched openings with balustrades; the openings are trimmed with green paint. The belfry has two bells; an additional bell is lying on the ground outside.
- c. Cupola: A square cupola rises from the nave. It is sided with vertical boards and has a pyramidal roof. On the south there is a four-light window; the window on the north has been closed off.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The nave and sanctuary are each one open space. The belltower has two levels below that of the belfry.
2. Stairways: There is a ladder in the belltower that leads to the belfry.
3. Flooring: Linoleum.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are wallboard with a wainscot of vertical tongue-and-groove boards. The baseboard, chair rail, and frieze are varnished wood. The board ceiling and wainscot are painted blue, while the walls are white.

In the belltower, the walls are horizontal boards. The east wall is novelty siding painted white, which indicates that it was an exterior wall, but according to Ephraim Agnot it was not exposed for long.

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5. Doorways and doors: There are double doors between the nave and belltower, featuring five rectangular panels. The panels are unpainted, but the rest of the door is blue.
6. Decorative features: The iconostas is a horizontal board wall, painted white, divided into seven parts horizontally by varnished wood moldings. The icons on the iconostas are painted, oil on canvas, whereas elsewhere in the nave they tend to be printed.

There is an octagonal dome about 3' high, with a flat ceiling. The dome does not extend above the roof.

The windows are topped with pediments with a cross.

7. Mechanical equipment: The building has electricity. Heat is from an oil-fired furnace.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The building faces west, with its sanctuary on the east end. The church is located at the north end of town, on a windswept hill. Two spruce trees, rare in this part of the island, are located on the south side of the church.
2. Historic landscape design: There are numerous graves to the east and north of the church, as well as the site of the former church.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Interview:

Ephraim Agnot, reader, interviewed by author, July 3, 1989.

B. Bibliography:

Alaskan Russian Church Archives, reel 180, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

"Concerning the Orthodox Mission in America," October 14, 1895, translated by Sister Victoria, Orthodox Alaska 6 (January 1977): 36-46.

Petroff, Ivan. Report on the Population, Industries, and Resources of Alaska. Washington: GPO, 1884.

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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of the Protection of the Holy Theotokos Russian Orthodox Church was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), a division of the National Park Service, the state of Alaska and the Icon Preservation Task Force. The project was executed under the general direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of HABS/HAER, and Boyd Evison, Alaska Regional Director, National Park Service. Recording was carried out during summer 1989 by Steven M. Peterson, project director; Jean Swearingen, curator; John Lowe III, photographer; and Alison K. Hoagland, historian, who prepared this report.

ADDENDUM TO
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